Amendment to the Claims

1.   (Currently amended) An article joining control method for joining articles conveyed and stored in a plurality of auxiliary conveyance paths, from said plurality of auxiliary conveyance paths to a main conveyance path conveying articles, in which when a spacing equal to or greater than a predetermined length is detected between articles or between groups of articles being conveyed on the main conveyance path, the stored articles corresponding to the length of the spacing are cut out from the auxiliary conveyance paths to the main conveyance path, characterized in that

~~when the articles have been cut out from each auxiliary conveyance path for joining, a spacing is created on said auxiliary conveyance path prior to next carrying in of articles to prevent the articles from being successively cut out from only one auxiliary conveyance path to the main conveyance path.~~

when it is confirmed that articles are stored at a position in close proximity to a junction with the main conveyance path and a time-up period lapses, each auxiliary conveyance path reserves a detected spacing, subsequently when this reserved spacing approaches the junction, the articles are cut out from the auxiliary conveyance path for joining to the spacing, and when the articles have been cut out, carrying articles into the auxiliary conveyance path is stopped for a given time.

2.   (Cancelled)

3.   (Currently amended) An article joining control method as set forth in claim ~~2~~ 1, characterized in that

when the articles stored in the auxiliary conveyance path cannot be cut out all at once to the reserved spacing, this auxiliary conveyance path is given priority

over the other auxiliary conveyance paths in reserving a spacing for cutting out the remaining articles in said auxiliary conveyance path.

4.   (Cancelled)

5.   (Original) An article joining control method as set forth in Claim 1 characterized in that

the spacing equal to or greater than a predetermined length is a spacing equal to a spacing preset between the groups of articles in a before-and-behind relation plus a minimum length of the stored article.